These include schemes for extending financial assistance to the seafood processing industry, steps to upgrade processing facilities to meet international standards of hygiene and quality; expansion of aquaculture; assistance to produce value-added products for export; marketing support etc.

Waivers for statutory requirements

1963. SHRI ABANI ROY: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) the reasons due to which several Export Promotion Councils and Trade Associations have been permitted to waive statutory requirements;

(b) if so, the details of such waivers allowed during the last three years, year-wise; and

(c) whether Government are aware that such waivers lead to concentration of power in hands of few persons and democratic process is broken?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI E.V.K.S. ELANGOVAN): (a) The Export Promotion Councils have been permitted, with the approval of the Government, to make amendments in the articles/bye-laws in order to effect their smooth functioning.

(b) The Government have been approval to the amendments in the articles/bye-laws of the Export Promotion Councils, during the last three years as indicated below:

Year	Number of Amendments
2001-02	55
2002-03	9
2003-04	1

(c) Any departure from the established procedure by way of amendments to be carried out in the bye-laws requires Government's approval before giving effect. The Government examines the requests of the Councils for amendments in the bye-laws and approve them keeping

In view the facts that such amendments do not lead to concentration of power at a particular level and also do not violate democratic process.

Abolitions of Central Sales Tax

1964. SHRI ABANI ROY: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether exporters have requested for abolishing levy of Central Sales Tax imposed by the State Government on inputs required for export production under deemed exports;

(b) whether Government have examined the matter; and

(c) the steps taken by Government in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI E.V.K.S. ELANGOVAN): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) and (c) The Government has constituted a Technical Experts Committee to examine and make recommendations on the modalities for phasing out Central Sales Tax and the smooth implementation of VAT from 1.4.2005.

Competition in global rice market

1965. SHRI K.B. KRISHNA MURTHY: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether Thailand's long-grained aromatic jasmine rice dominates the global rice market as a cheaper substitute for Basmati rice;

(b) whether Pakistan, India's rival in global rice market, is trying for concessional duty regime in the European Union; and

(c) if so, Government's plan to counter stiff competition posed by Thailand and Pakistan in global rice market?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI E.V.K.S. ELANGOVAN): (a) No, Sir.

(b) Both India and Pakistan have been enjoying a special dispensation for export of Basmati rice to European Union (EU) under Head Note 7 of the Schedule of concessions filed by EU in WTO.

(c) The Government of India is currently engaged in Article XXVIII